

play lab

The Remedy for Tuberculosis.

Question of Priority Pronounced upon.

“The Truth at Last.”

Article from *The Times and Register* of New York
and Philadelphia, U. S. A., Jan. 24, 1891.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

At last we have the whole truth before us regarding the lymph. From two directions light has been let into the dark corner. Virchow gives us the astounding intelligence that in the bodies of those dying from the lymph he has discovered fresh crops of tubercles; occurring under such conditions as to occasion the direct inference that the inoculations had themselves produced the new infection; and that living bacilli, or more probably, spores, were to be found in the lymph employed.

This, however, should not be allowed to weigh too heavily against the lymph, as Koch has repeatedly and emphatically given warning against the danger involved in the use of this substance. It is unavoidable that in the preparation of such an agent, as yet but little understood, some difficulties should arise that future experience will avoid. Jenner was puzzled by the failure of his vaccinations, until he succeeded in tracing it to the use of virus weakened by age. If under Koch's keen eye some lymph should not be perfectly sterilized, what are we to expect when experimenters of high and low degree, the enterprising manufacturer, the wily substituter, *et id omne genus* undertake to supply the demand for lymph? Heaven save us!

Now as to the composition of the lymph. Koch tells us it is simply a product of the culture of the tubercle bacillus in a medium containing 40 per cent. of glycerine. The active agent has not been separated and analyzed.

We are now prepared to pronounce upon the claims of Dixon, as compared with those of Koch. Dixon made cultures of the tubercle bacillus, sterilized these cultures, and administered them to guinea-pigs and other animals, and proved that these animals thereby acquired a certain degree of immunity against tuberculosis. The theory that the tubercle bacillus produces an agent that is toxic to that bacillus originated with Dixon, and his experiments proved that there was truth in the theory. But Dixon did not employ his lymph as a means of curing tuberculosis already existent ; he did not consider his lymph an agent that could be usefully and safely employed on man, and this is his opinion to-day. This is not a matter for debate ; it is history ; and these things were published one year before Koch gave utterance to his first word on the subject. Now, what has Koch added to Dixon's work ? The German has also prepared a culture, using a somewhat different medium, has sterilized the product, and has employed it as a means of treating tubercular diseases. In external tuberculosis he has had remarkable success ; the permanency of which is still in doubt. In internal tuberculosis the results have been exceedingly questionable ; death having undoubtedly been in some cases occasioned by the lymph ; re-inoculation with living tubercle germs occurring occasionally, and attributable probably to imperfect sterilization of the lymph ; while no single instance of indisputable cure has as yet been recorded. The conclusion that fair-minded men must reach is that Koch deserves great credit for his acuteness in recognizing the importance of Dixon's work ; and

far his boldness in extending the use of the lymph to the treatment of tuberculosis in man.

Again we are constrained to warn the public against the expectacion of too much at the beginning. Great inventions rarely spring, Minerva-like, in full panoply, from the brain of the sire. The magnificent locomotives turned out by the Baldwin works grew from a firstling that would look rather insignificant besides these latest developments of the idea. The greatness of this new discovery lies in its possibilities.

Furthermore, we incline strongly to the view of Dixon, that in its present state the lymph is too dangerous to be employed in the human subject. When the active agent has been isolated, and we have at our disposal preparations whose freedom from living bacilli or spores is absolutely certain, we can recommend it to our patients with a clear conscience.

It will be seen that the views announced by *The Times and Register* when Koch's announcement was first made, views that have been repeatedly published since, have been fully confirmed in every respect. We did not hold back the journal last week, in order to give the composition of Koch's lymph, and the confirmation of Dixon's claims, as these things would not have been news to our readers. All we have to regret is that our esteemed contemporaries did not see fit to aid us in the stand we made for the rights of an American investigator and the credit of American science.

